

Learning Disabilities

Definition: Learning disabilities are characterized by a significant difference in the child's achievement in some areas as compared to his or her overall intelligence. Learning disabilities may occur in the following areas: spoken language, written language, arithmetic, reasoning, and organization skills.

Incidence: It is estimated that 5% to 10% of the general population are affected by learning disabilities.

- Activities

- 1.) Elementary School Age
 - a.) Learning to Read
 - b.) Mirror Maze
- 2.) Middle School Age
 - a.) Epithets -- The Power of Words
 - b.) Alice in Wonderland Existence
- 3.) High School Age
 - a.) Rabbit Story
 - b.) Class Story

- Fact Sheet on Learning Disabilities
- Disability Myths
- Bibliography of Children's Literature & Audio Visual Materials
- Community Resource Numbers

*****Guest Speaker Presentation Idea:***

Learning Disabilities Association
76 Cranbrook Road, #299
Cockeysville, MD 21030-3479
410-821-7010

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Learning To Read

Purpose: To increase understanding and sensitivity to the difficulties some children encounter in learning to read.

Materials: Worksheets of words and symbols.

Activity: Make up some symbols for words that your children can read. Give each child a sheet with 10 symbols and the corresponding words. Give them one minute to study the list. Tell them to turn over the page and look at the next sheet which has on it the 10 symbols in a different order. The children must write the correct word next to each symbol.

Talk about how this experiment might correspond to the difficulties some children have in learning to read. In both cases, how would it feel to be pressured to hurry up, get everything perfect, etc. Talk about how, when anyone has learning problems, teachers can find other ways to help that person learn. It takes more time and sometimes different ways.

Barnes, Ellen, Carol Berrigan, and Douglas Biklen. What's the Difference: Teaching Positive Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities. Syracuse, NY: Human Policy Press, 1978.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mirror Maze

Purpose: To help students understand how a learning disability may create difficulty distinguishing left from right, and experience other visual perceptual difficulties that make everyday tasks more difficult.

Materials: Hand held mirrors, geometric design worksheets (a circle surrounding a triangle will work)

Activity:

1. Hand out the geometric design worksheets.
2. Distribute mirrors to all the students. Mirrors from broken compacts are excellent. Tape the backs of the mirrors with cloth tape. Thus if a mirror breaks it will not splinter.
3. Have the students place the circle/triangle design to the left or right of the mirror. Put a blank sheet of paper in front of the mirror.
4. Tell the students not to look at the blank paper. While looking at the design and in the mirror, the students are to reproduce the design on the paper. Remember the students are told to look at the blank paper.
5. Discuss how they felt as they tried to copy the symbol.

Reference: People Like Us, Disability Awareness Curriculum For Montana's Students, Edited by : Katharine A. Kelker. Parents, Let's Unite For Kids, Billings, Montana

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Epithets -- The Power of Words

Purpose: To help students understand where epithets come from and how to respond to them.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Activity: Ask the students if they know the differences between "connotation" and "denotation." Each word has both a connotation (subjective, evaluative dimension) and a denotation (an objective reference). When we respond to other people's words we respond to what the words connote to us as well as what they denote. The connotations of words vary from person to person and group to group according to their positive and negative values and standards. An epithet is a negative name that people use about others; often epithets have to do with a person's race, religion, disability, sex, appearance, political beliefs, all things which are important to a person's identity. Have the students give examples of epithets they've heard. Make a chart indicating epithets referring to each of these aspects of a person's identity.

Have a general discussion on why people call others names. Ask students why? Responses might include lack of respect, dislike of a person's behavior, need to feel important or better than other people, etc. Write the responses given on the board.

Ask each student to identify out loud or on paper names they have been called that made them angry. Talk about these out loud and discuss how it makes them feel and what they do when it happens.

Barnes, Ellen, Carol Berrigan, and Douglas Biklen. What's the Difference: Teaching Positive Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities. Syracuse, NY: Human Policy Press, 1978.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Alice in Wonderland Existence

Purpose: To help students understand how a learning disability might impact on how someone learns to read. Typical problems encountered by students with learning disabilities include: difficulty distinguishing left from right, forgetting the sounds that letters make, forgetting how a word is supposed to look, mistaking some letters for others (an "r" may appear as "n"), or writing words and letters backwards ("was" may look like "saw").

Materials: Copies of the reading exercise

Activity:

Pass out this assignment and tell students they have three minutes to complete -- be stern. Ask students to hand in their papers with their names so you can share their answers with the whole class. After silently reviewing the answers you have collected, ask how they are feeling about the assignment and explain its purpose. Share the correct answer with the class.

Reference: People Like Us, Disability Awareness Curriculum For Montana's Students, Edited by: Katharine A. Kelker. Parents, Let's Unite For Kids, Billings, Montana.

Reading Exercise

DIRECTIONS:

Read the following passage quickly and be prepared to answer comprehension questions about it.

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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. To what type of existence is the child's experience compared?
2. Name the three things with which a learning disabled child must cope.

Reading Exercise

TRANSLATION

I suspect that the child with a learning disability must frequently experience an Alice in Wonderland existence. Often we find that he must cope with an unstable world, inconsistent adults, and haphazard perceptions.

ANSWERS TO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. The learning disabled child's experience is compared to an Alice in Wonderland existence.
2. The learning disabled child must cope with (1) unstable world, (2) inconsistent adults, and (3) haphazard perceptions.

Rabbit Story

Ονχε τηρε ωας α λιττλε βυννψ ωηο ωαντεδ το γρω υπ το βε α βιγ ραββιτ. Ιτ τριεδ ασ ηαρδ ασ ιτ χουλδ, δοινγ τηνγς λικε ηοππινγ, ρυννινγ, λεαπινγ, ανδ πλαψινγ. Βυτ νο μαπτερ ηωω ηαρδ ιτ τριεδ, ιτ σπιλλ ρεμαινεδ α λιττλε βυννψ.

Ονε δαψ, φεελινγ τηατ ιτ ωουλδ νεπερ γρωω υπ, τηε λιττλε βυννψ ηαδ αν ιδεα. Ιτ ωουλδ ασκ α βιγ ραββιτ το τελλ ιτ ηωω το γρωω υπ! Τηε λιττλε βυννψ ηαδ το ωαιτ α λογγ τιμε βεφορε ιτ γοτ υπ τηε νερπε το ασκ, βυτ ωηεν ιτ διδ, τηε βιγ ραββιτ σμιλεδ.

Λιττλε βυννψ, ιτ σαιδ. Ψου μιγητ νοτ κνωω ιτ, βυτ ψουερε γρωωινγ βιγгер επερψ δαψ. Βεφορε λογγ, ψουελλ βε α βιγ ραββιτ τοο, ωιτηουτ επεν τριψινγ.

Τηε λιττλε βυννψ, ηαππψ το ηεαρ τηε ωορδς οφ τηε βιγ ραββιτ, σπεντ τηε ρεστ οφ ιτς δαψς ηοππινγ, ρυννινγ, λεαπινγ, ανδ πλαψινγ, ανδ συρε ενουγη, γρωω υπ ωιτηουτ επεν τριψινγ!

Questions:

- 1.What did the little bunny want to do?
- 2.What was little bunny's idea?
- 3.What did big rabbit tell little bunny?
4. How did little bunny grow up?

Rabbit Story

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to grow up to be a big rabbit. It tried as hard as it could, doing things like hopping, running, leaping, and playing. But no matter how hard it tried, it still remained a little bunny.

One day, feeling that it would never grow up, the little bunny had an idea. It would ask a big rabbit to tell it how to grow up! The little bunny had to wait a long time before it got up the nerve to ask, but when it did, the big rabbit smiled.

"Little bunny," it said. "You might not know it, but you're growing bigger every day. Before long, you'll be a big rabbit too, without even trying."

The little bunny, happy to hear the words of the big rabbit, spent the rest of its days hopping, running, leaping, and playing, and sure enough, grew up without even trying!

Questions:

1. What did the little bunny want to do?

He wanted to grow up.

2. What was little bunny's idea?

He would ask big rabbit to tell how to grow up.

3. What did big rabbit tell little bunny?

Big rabbit said that little bunny was growing every day.

4. How did little bunny grow up?

Little bunny grew up without even trying.

HIGH SCHOOL

Rabbit Story

Purpose: To help students understand the frustration that children with learning disabilities experience, the class will be asked to read a selection written as it might appear to a child with learning disabilities.

Materials: Rabbit Story Reading Worksheet

Activity:

Call on students to read aloud from the Rabbit Story and to answer the questions. (This activity is also featured in the FAT CITY video used in the *How Difficult Can This Be* activity in the Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder section of this guide.) Some students may surprise you in their ability to figure this out! Have one of your students read the translated Rabbit story for the class.

Reference: People Like Us, Disability Awareness Curriculum For Montana's Students, Edited by: Katharine A. Kelker. Parents, Let's Unite For Kids, Billings, Montana

HIGH SCHOOL

Class Story

Purpose: For students to understand difficulties encountered when learning disabilities delay the way the brain processes auditory information when a response is required.

Materials: None

Activity:

Tell the class you want to tap into their creative thinking skills by starting a story that each class member will expand on and so forth until all class members have a chance to contribute to the story. The catch is that none of the words students use in the story can have the letter "n."

The story starts like this: "Very early that day I took a walk- to the beach....."

After the activity, discuss the extra time students needed to respond to make sure they didn't use words with the letter "n." How would this affect someone on the job, during an interview, or in social situations?



LEARNING DISABILITIES

◆ Definition ◆

The regulations for Public Law (P.L.) 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), define a learning disability as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations."

The Federal definition further states that learning disabilities include "such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia." According to the law, learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Definitions of learning disabilities also vary among states.

Having a single term to describe this category of children with disabilities reduces some of the confusion, but there are many conflicting theories about what causes learning disabilities and how many there are. The label "learning disabilities" is all-embracing; it describes a syndrome, not a specific child with specific problems. The definition assists in classifying children, not teaching them. Parents and teachers need to concentrate on the individual child. They need to observe both how and how well the child performs, to assess strengths and weaknesses, and develop ways to help each child learn. It is important to remember that there is a high degree of interrelationship and overlapping among the areas of learning. Therefore, children with learning disabilities may exhibit a combination of characteristics.

These problems may mildly, moderately, or severely impair the learning process.

◆ Incidence ◆

Many different estimates of the number of children with learning disabilities have appeared in the literature (ranging from 1% to 30% of the general population). In

1987, the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities concluded that 5% to 10% is a reasonable estimate of the percentage of persons affected by learning disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) reported that more than 5% of all school-aged children received special education services for learning disabilities and that in the 1996-97 school year over 2.6 million children with learning disabilities were served. Differences in estimates perhaps reflect variations in the definition.

◆ Characteristics ◆

Learning disabilities are characterized by a significant difference in the child's achievement in some areas, as compared to his or her overall intelligence.

Students who have learning disabilities may exhibit a wide range of traits, including problems with reading comprehension, spoken language, writing, or reasoning ability. Hyperactivity, inattention, and perceptual coordination problems may also be associated with learning disabilities. Other traits that may be present include a variety of symptoms, such as uneven and unpredictable test performance, perceptual impairments, motor disorders, and behaviors such as impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration, and problems in handling day-to-day social interactions and situations.

Learning disabilities may occur in the following academic areas:

1. Spoken language: Delays, disorders, or discrepancies in listening and speaking;
2. Written language: Difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling;
3. Arithmetic: Difficulty in performing arithmetic functions or in comprehending basic concepts;
4. Reasoning: Difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts; and
5. Organization skills: Difficulty in organizing all facets of learning.

LEARNING DISABILITIES

◆ Educational Implications ◆

Because learning disabilities are manifested in a variety of behavior patterns, the Individual Education Program (IEP) must be designed carefully. A team approach is important for educating the child with a learning disability, beginning with the assessment process and continuing through the development of the IEP. Close collaboration among special class teachers, parents, resource room teachers, regular class teachers, and others will facilitate the overall development of a child with learning disabilities.

Some teachers report that the following strategies have been effective with some students who have learning disabilities:

- Capitalize on the student's strengths;
- Provide high structure and clear expectations;
- Use short sentences and a simple vocabulary;
- Provide opportunities for success in a supportive atmosphere to help build self-esteem;
- Allow flexibility in classroom procedures (e.g., allowing the use of tape recorders for note-taking and test-taking when students have trouble with written language);
- Make use of self-correcting materials, which provide immediate feedback without embarrassment;
- Use computers for drill and practice and teaching word processing;
- Provide positive reinforcement of appropriate social skills at school and home; and
- Recognize that students with learning disabilities can greatly benefit from the gift of time to grow and mature.

◆ Resources ◆

Directory of facilities and services for the learning disabled (16th ed.). (1997). Novato, CA: Academic Therapy. [Telephone: 1-800-422-7249 (outside CA); (415) 883-3314.]

Journal of Learning Disabilities. Available from Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin TX 78758. [Telephone: (512) 451-3246.]

Lab School of Washington. (1993). *Issues of parenting children with learning disabilities* (audiotape series of 12 lectures). Washington, DC: Author. [Telephone: (202) 965-6600.]

Mackenzie, L. (1997). *The complete learning disabilities directory*. Lakeville, CT: GreyHouse. (Telephone: (806) 435-0867.)

Silver, L. (1991). *The misunderstood child: A guide for parents of children with learning disabilities* (2nd ed.). New York, NY:

McGraw Hill. (Available from McGraw Hill, 860 Taylor Station Rd., Blacklick, OH 43004. [Telephone: 1-800-262-4729.]

Smith, S. (1995). *No easy answers* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Bantam Books. (Available from Bantam, 2451 South Wolf Rd., Des Plaines, IL 60018. [Telephone: 1-800-323-9872.]

◆ Organisations ◆

Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)
P.O. Box 40303
Overland Park, KS 66204
(913) 492-8755

Division for Learning Disabilities
Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Dr.
Reston, VA 22091-1589
(703) 620-3660
URL: <http://www.cec.sped.org>

International Dyslexia Association
(formerly the Orton Dyslexia Society)
Chester Building, Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
(410) 296-0232
(800) 222-3123 (Toll Free)
E-Mail: info@interdys.org
URL: <http://www.interdys.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515; (412) 341-8077; (888) 300-6710
E-mail: ldanatl@usaor.net
URL: <http://www.ldanatl.org>

National Center for Learning Disabilities
381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1401
New York, NY 10016
(212) 545-7510; 1(888) 575-7373
URL: <http://www.nclld.org>

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"Disability Myths"

People with disabilities have been the Subject of many myths and misconceptions which interfere with their acceptance into the mainstream of society. To help deflate some of the major myths about disabilities, this information which appears in the "Disabilities Resource Guide" of the KIDS Project, Center for Independent Living, Berkeley, California, is presented.

Prevalent Myths about Children with Learning Disabilities

MYTH: Children with learning disabilities have mental retardation.

FACT: Children with learning disabilities range in intelligence from average to gifted. Many children function as if they have mental retardation because their individual learning needs are often overlooked and not compensated for in school.

MYTH: There's nothing wrong; the child doesn't want to do schoolwork; s/he doesn't pay attention; s/he is just lazy or obstinate.

FACT: Although all children can be lazy or obstinate at times, some children with learning disabilities may experience difficulties in remembering the order of events, remembering where they left a pencil, determining what is relevant and what is not, remembering how to write letters and numbers, and so on. Taking time to remember may result in work not finished. Becoming frustrated at the inability to "do it right" may result in unfinished work or obstinate behavior.

MYTH: Because the child takes so long or doesn't complete assignments means the work is too hard.

FACT: Some children may not have the developmental skills necessary for succeeding at the level of the class. they may be unable to distinguish squares from circles or tall from short. They may not know what is meant by "around," "next," "far," or "near."

Bibliography

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Swenson, Judy Harris and Kunz, Roxane Brown. *Learning My Way: I'm a Winner!*. Dillon, 1986.

Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *Probably Still Nick Swansen*. Henry Holt & Company, 1988.

RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

State/National Resource Organizations

Maryland Associates for Dyslexic
Adults and Youth (MADAY)
711 W. 40th Street
The Rotunda Suite 310
Baltimore, MD 21211
410-889-5487

Orton Dyslexia Society
Chester Building Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
800-222-3123

Council for Learning Disabilities
P.O. Box 40303
Overland Park, KS 66204
913-492-8755

Division for Learning Disabilities
Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091-1589
703-620-3660

Learning Disabilities Association of
America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
800-328-0272

National Center for Learning
Disabilities
1381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1420
New York, NY 10016
212-545-7510

Local Organizations

Learning Disabilities Association of
Metropolitan Baltimore Chapter
Susan Gallagher: 301-473-4929

Group for the Independent Learning
Disabled
Fred Schutzman: 410-486-7393